

The Coral Tree

TEXT Mamata Pandya PHOTOGRAPHS Pankaj Gorana

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The Coral Tree (English)

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Photograph of the Indian Coral Tree on page 31 © Sagar Vasant Mhatre

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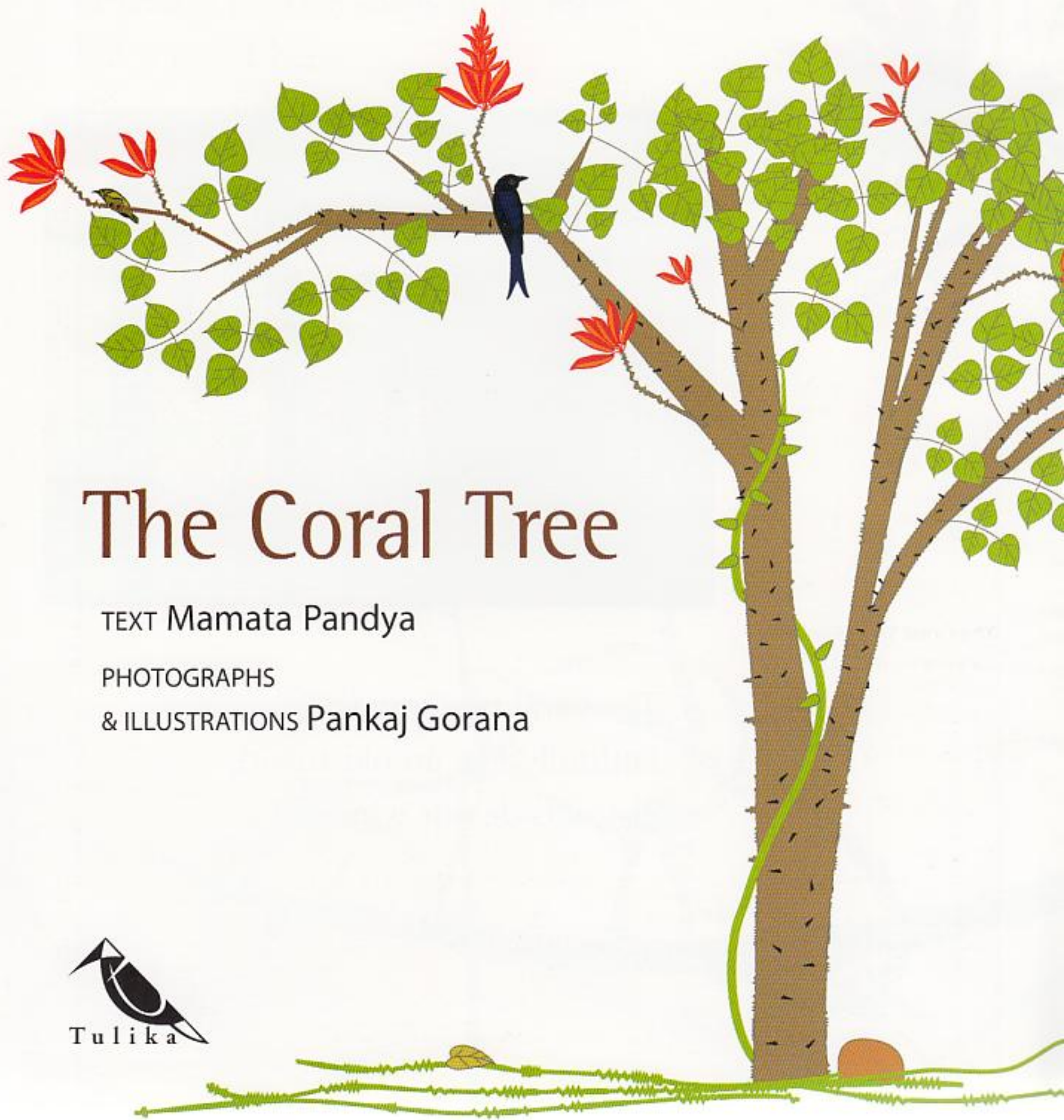
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& ILLUSTRATIONS Pankaj Gorana





The coral tree stands
faithfully like an old friend,
just outside our window.

In winter the tree sheds all its leaves.
But it is not bare.
Climbers and creepers have wrapped
themselves around the branches,
springing up somewhere,
sometimes
hanging
down.





It's February.

One morning there's a burst of orange crimson.

Last year the flowers peeped in
through our window.

This year the tree has grown taller.



A cluster of conical buds,
sleek and tight,
blossom into flowers
in a splash of colour.



THERE ARE OVER 100 species
of the coral tree in the world.

From dawn till dusk
the branches are filled with
callings and cooings,
dipping and sipping.



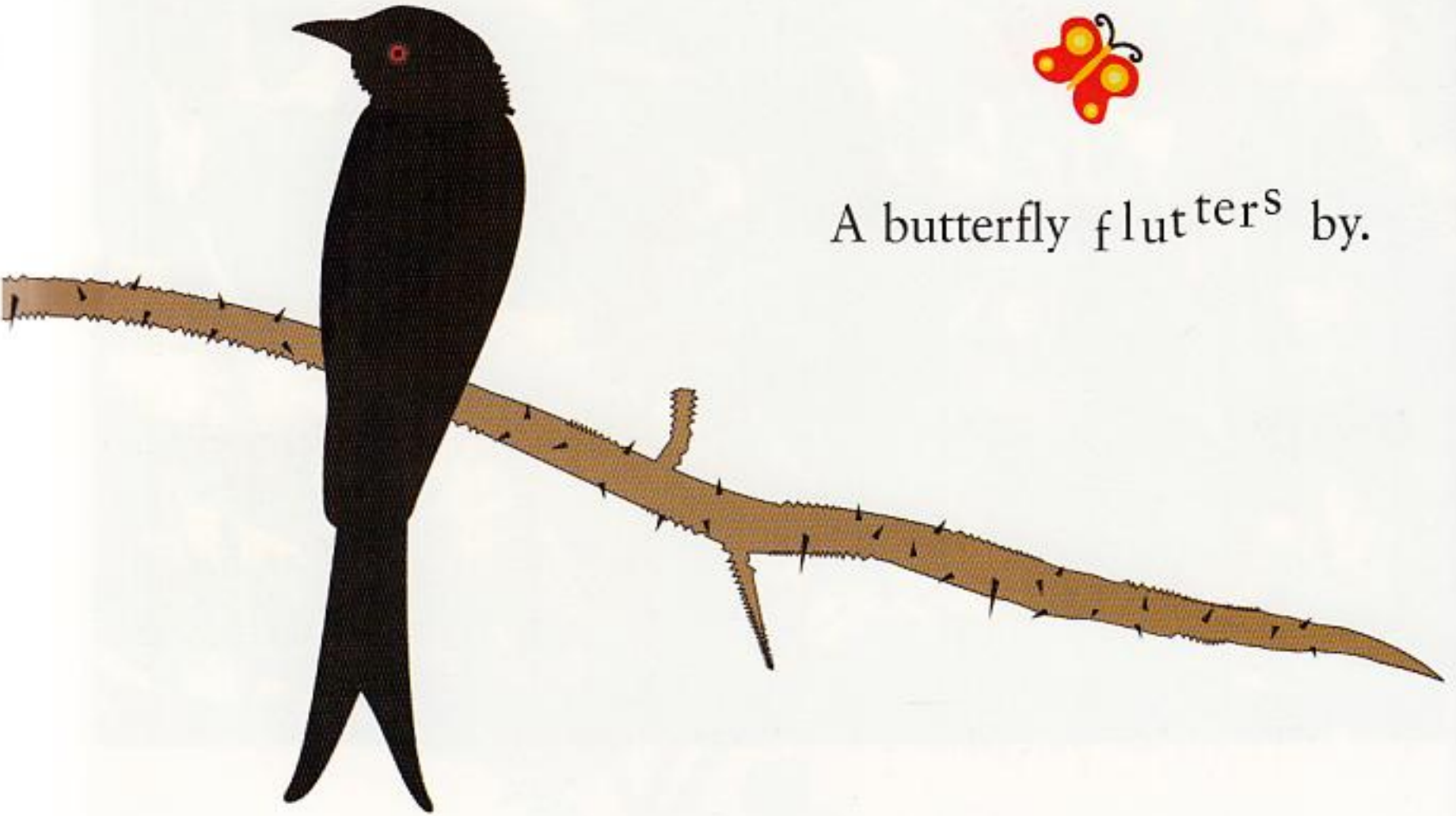


Black Drongo gazes up at the flowers
and looks forward to a treat.
The nectar is a change
from its usual diet of insects.

“I want the tree all to myself!”
it declares.



A butterfly flutters by.



THIS THORNY TREE
can grow up to be
70 feet tall.



“Towit, towit, towit!”

It's almost lunchtime.

Tiny Tailorbird tweets its arrival.

It dips its long beak into a flower,
sip sip sip.

Its long tail goes up and down,
tip tip tip.



Sunbird isn't far behind.

“Cheewit,
cheewit,
cheewit!”

It sucks up the nectar with its straw-like beak.



All afternoon a band of
Babblers take over,

h^op pⁱng and bobbing,
poking and prodding.



They keep a sharp lookout
with their beady eyes.



THE TREE HAS
large heart-shaped leaves,
three on a short stem.



Suddenly there is an agitated babbling chorus.

“Look out! Look out!”

Here comes Rat Snake,
coiling and gliding up the thorny trunk!



Lone Dove on the thorny branch
wonders at the flurry.



THE BUDS ARE wrapped in a brownish case,
which allows two of the five segments of the
flower to peep out like ears.



From the tree across
Koel calls out,
“Kik, kik! I can see it too!”



“Kooo, kooo, kooo!”

replies its mate, hidden among the leaves.



DO YOU KNOW that the
flowers of the coral tree
have no scent?

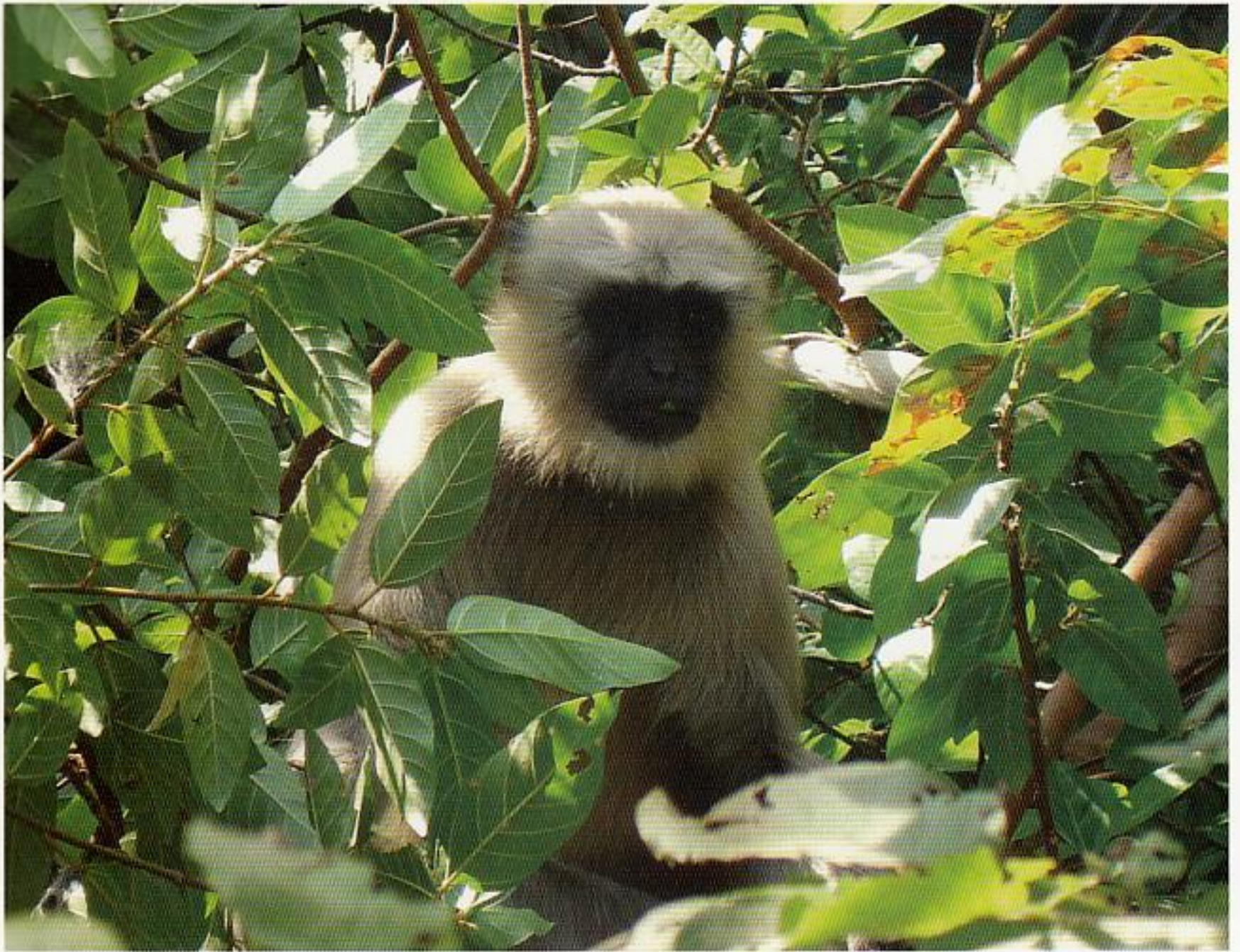


“Keeah, keeah, keeah!”

shrieks Parakeet.

“No juicy fruit on that tree.

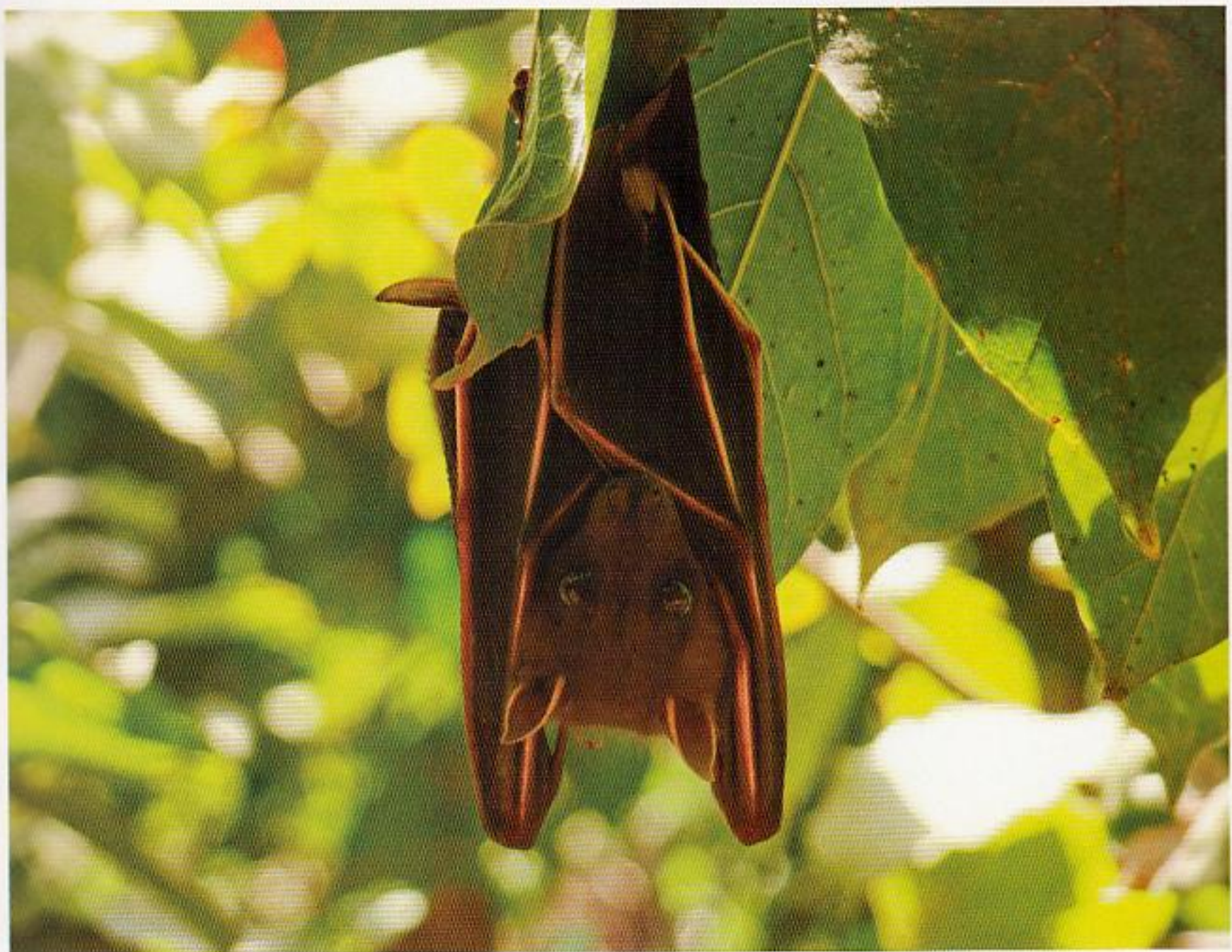
Nectar is not for me.”



“Munch, munch!”
Langur prefers tender leaves.



WHEN BIRDS FEED on the nectar,
pollen comes onto their heads and
breasts, scattering as they fly.



Through the hustle and bustle of the day,
Bat is fast asleep.
It will wake up and fly at dusk,
when the rest have settled for the night.



Cat gazes calmly from near the tree.
“This is a cosy spot for me.”



THE GREEN PODS
of the tree turn black
as they ripen.



It's evening.

The gardener comes.

Whoosh!

Swoooosh!

He washes off all the dust.



Flowers and leaves sparkle
in the light of the evening sun.



Dusk descends, the sky grows dark.
The coral tree stands tall and proud.



THE SMOOTH EGG-SHAPED seeds
are brown, black or purple.



Tomorrow is another day.

New flowers will bloom, old and new friends
will come to feast and flit, flutter and fly.

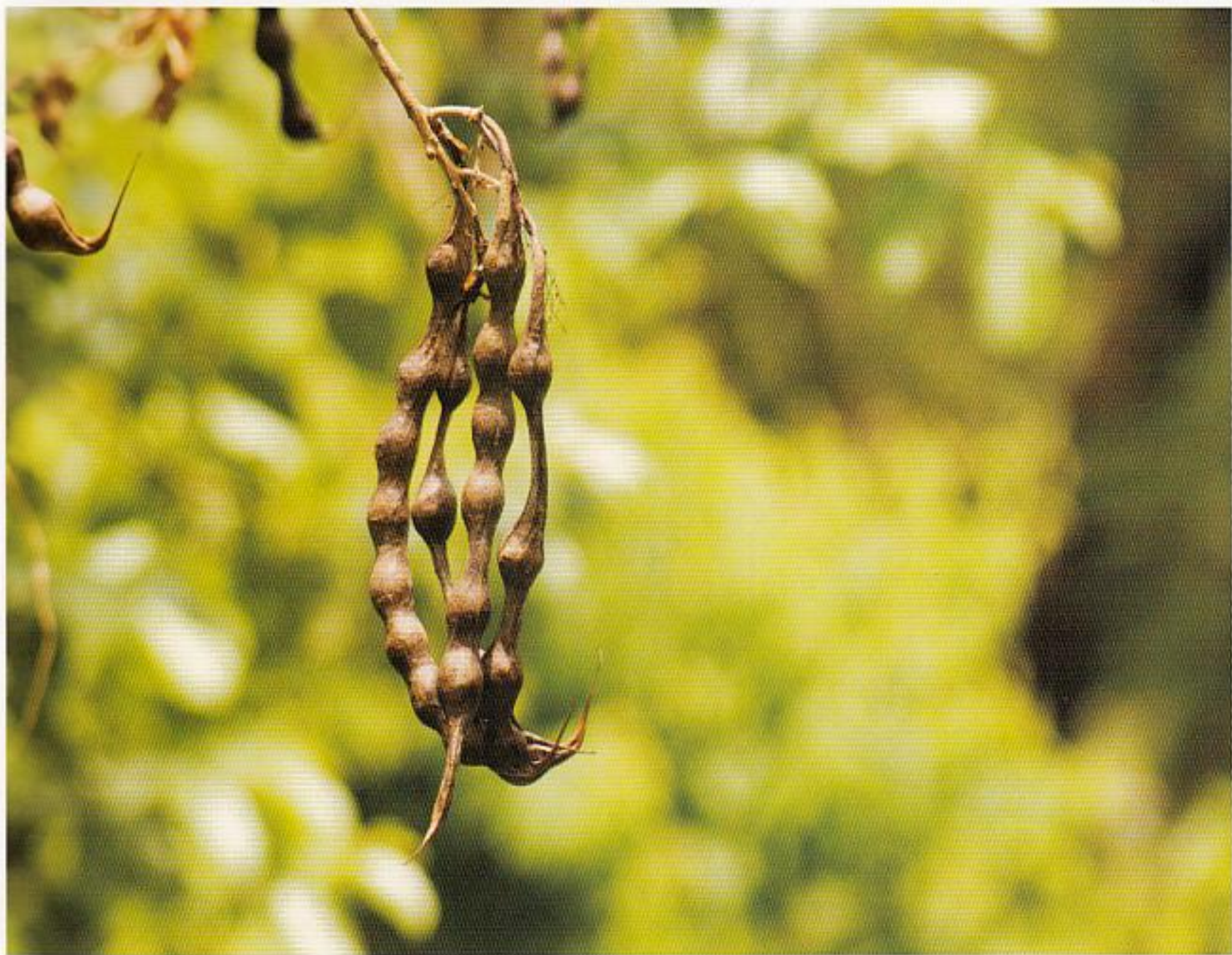




In two weeks, or three,
the carnival will be over.

HAVE YOU EVER
recorded a year in
life of a tree?






The flowers will dry and drop,
green pods will appear,
all the crimson gone,
only shades of green.



Until next year when it's spring again.





The Indian Coral Tree (*Erythrina indica*)
has different names in
different languages

HINDI: Mandara, panjira

TAMIL: Kalyana murungai

MALAYALAM: Kaliyana murrunku

KANNADA: Mandara

TELUGU: Badisa

MARATHI: Pangara

GUJARATI: Panervo

BANGLA: Palita mandar, rakta mandar



Admirers of the coral tree
include bees and wasps.



Necklaces and bracelets
are made from the seeds.



A strong-scented
dye can be made from
the flowers.



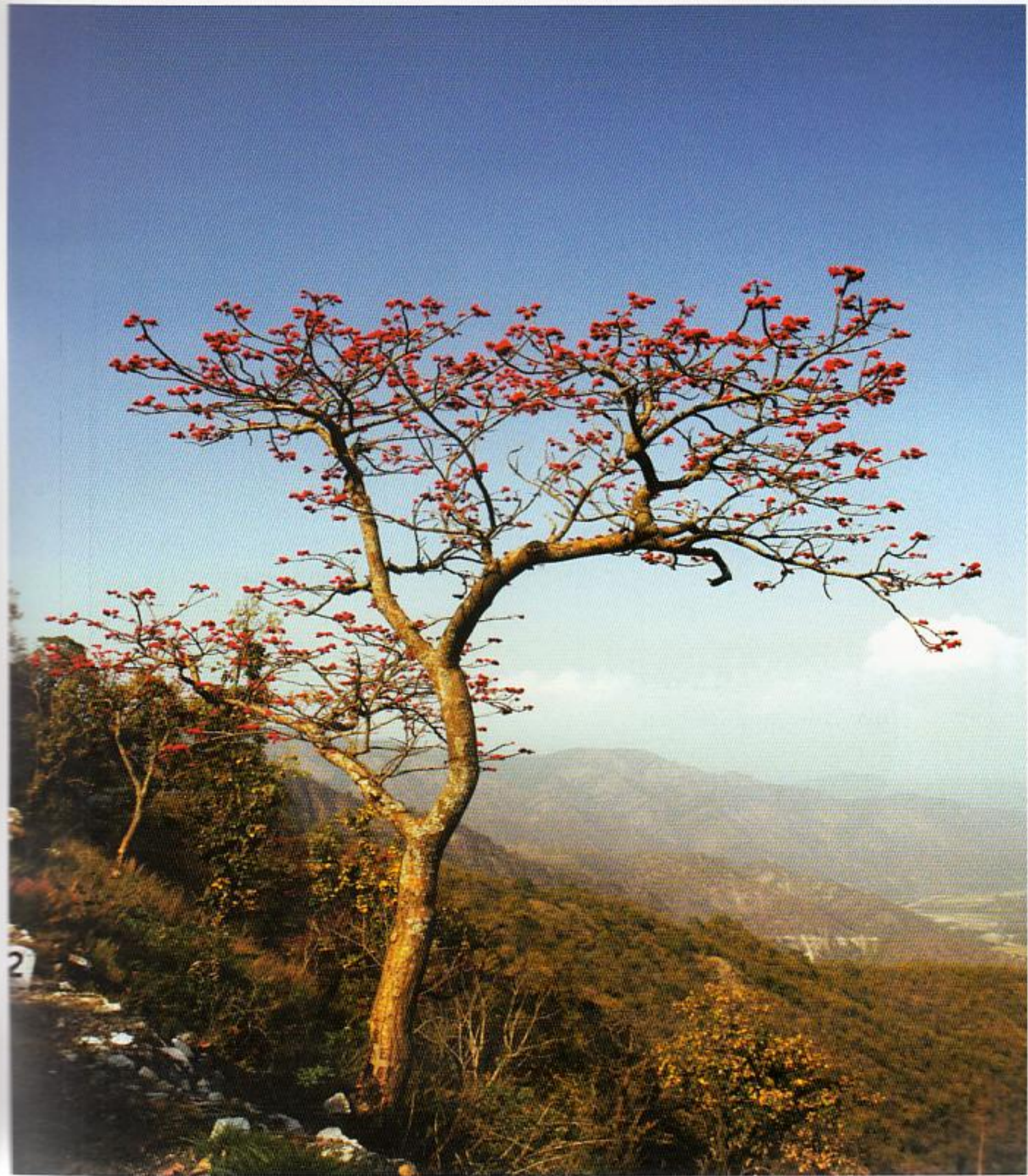
People eat the
fresh leaves in curries.
It is also used as
cattle fodder.



It is believed that Krishna
stole the sapling of the coral tree
from Indra's garden!



The coral tree
is also called Tiger's Claw
and Magic Bean.



Make your own tree diary!

Think of your favourite tree . . .

Where can you find it?

Who all live in it?

What do the seeds look like?

What is it called in your mother tongue? Find out names in other languages too.

How long does it live?

Who visits?

When does it grow?

What's the most amazing thing about it?

How high does it grow?

What is it used for?

Is its trunk smooth or rough?

Are there myths and songs about it?



“From dawn till dusk the branches are filled with callings and cooings, dipping and sipping.”

Through the window, a resplendent coral tree comes to life. One morning there is a burst of orange crimson, and already the tree's many admirers have arrived: babblers, a langur, a rat snake... Evoking moods as varied as the creatures that inhabit the tree, the text pulsates with the energy and warmth of activity. Photographs beautifully capture the tree in different stages of its growth through many perspectives. Interesting tidbits provide additional information about the tree.

MAMATA PANDYA and PANKAJ GORANA share a window at the Centre for Environment Education, Ahmedabad, from which they savour the changing seasons with the coral tree. When they are not gazing out of the window, they enjoy developing exciting material for teachers and children. Mamata has translated many books for Tulika and is the author of the popular *All Free*. Pankaj is a designer, illustrator and photographer. He is the creative brain behind www.kidsrgreen.org, which was a finalist for the 2007 Stockholm Challenge Award.



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